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GREEN BRANCHES



THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
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Green Branches

By

James Stephens

AUTHOR OF "THE HILL OF VISION," "SONGS
FROM THE CLAY," "THE CROCK
OF GOLD," ETC.



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1915

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1916

JOY BE WITH US

GREEN BRANCHES

GREEN BRANCHES

The
Autumn in Ireland:
1915

(1)

It may be on a quiet mountain-
top,
Or in a valley folded among hills
You take your path, and often you
will stop
To hear the pleasant chatter of the
rills,
The piping of a wind in branches
green,
The murmuring of widely-lifted
spray
As long boughs swing
And hear the twittering

GREEN BRANCHES

Of drowsy birds when the great
sun is seen
Climbing the steep horizon to the
day.

The lovely moon trailing her silver
dress
By quiet waters. Each living star
Moving apart in holy quietness,
Sphere over golden sphere moving
afar,
These I can see;
And the unquiet zone
Rolling in snow along the edge of
sight.
The world is very fair, and I am
free
To see its beauty and to be
In solitude, and quite forget, and
quite

GREEN BRANCHES
Lose out of memory all I have
known
Of everything but this.

(2)

Straying apart in sad and mourn-
ful way,
Alone, or with my heart for com-
pany,
Keeping the tone of a dejected day
And a bewilderment that came to
me;
I said—The Spring
Will never come again, and there is
end
Of everything.

Day after day
The sap will ebb away from the
great tree,

And when the sap is gone
Then piteously
She tumbles to the clay:
And we say only—Such a one
Had pleasant shade, but there is
end of her.—

And you, and even you, the year
Will drain and dry, and you will
disappear.

Then to my heart there came so
wild a stir,
And such great pity and astonish-
ment,
And such a start of fear and woe
had I,
That where I went I did not know,
And only this did know,
That you could die.

(3)

I would have liked to sing from
fuller throat
To you who sang so well, but here
I stay
Resting the music on a falling note,
And hear it die away and die away,
With beauty unrehearsed, and life
and love
Unsung.

For I had clung,
With what of laughter and of
eagerness,
Unto the hope that I might chance
to be
The maker of a music nothing less
Than those great poets of anti-
quity,

Who sang of clouds and winds, of
hills and clods,
Of trees and streams, and of the
mind of man;
And chaunted too the universal
gods,
And their high guardianship since
time began;
And did not fail before a theme
although
It passed the reason.

(4)

I heard a bird sing in the woods
today
A failing song.
The times had caught on him.
In autumn boughs he tried a
wonted lay,

GREEN BRANCHES

And was abashed to find his music
grim
As the crows song.
Then, when I raised an air
To comfort him,
I wretched was to hear
The crow did croak and chatter
everywhere
Inside my ear

And so, behold,
I am a saddened elf;
And, as a deer
Flies timidly to shade,
I fly to laughter and I hide myself,
And couch me in the coverts that I
made
Against those bold ambitions, and
forswear
The palm, the prize, or what it is
of gear

GREEN DRAGON
A poet gets with his appointed
share
Of bread and beer.

(5)

Upon the grass I drop this tuneful
reed,
And turn from it aside, and turn
from more
That I had fancied to be mine in-
deed
Beyond all reclamation. See the
door
Set in the boundary wall yawns
windily,
It will be shut when I have wan-
dered through,
And open will no more again for me
This side of life whatever thing I
do.

GREEN BRANCHES

And so, good-bye, and so, good-
night to you,
And farewell all. Behold the lifted
hand,
And the long last look upon the
view,
And the last glimpse of that most
lovely land.
And thus away unto the mundane
sphere,
And look not back again nor turn
anew,
And hear no more that laughter at
the ear,
And sing no more for you.

The
Spring in Ireland:
1916

(1)

Do not forget my charge I beg of
you;
That of what flow'rs you find of
fairest hue
And sweetest odour you do gather
those
Are best of all the best—A fragrant
rose,
A tall calm lily from the waterside,
A half-blown poppy leaning at the
side
Its graceful head to dream among
the corn,

GREEN BRANCHES

Forget-me-nots that seem as
though the morn
Had tumbled down and grew into
the clay,
And hawthorn buds that swing
along the way
Easing the hearts of those who pass
them by
Until they find contentment—Do
not cry,
But gather buds, and with them
greenery
Of slender branches taken from a
tree
Well bannered by the spring that
saw them fall:
Then you, for you are cleverest of
all
Who have slim fingers and are
pitiful,

BRIMMING your lap with bloom
that you may cull,
Will sit apart, and weave for every
head
A garland of the flow'rs you
gatheréd.

(2)

Be green upon their graves, O
happy Spring,
For they were young and eager
who are dead;
Of all things that are young and
quivering
With eager life be they remem-
beréd:
They move not here, they have
gone to the clay,
They cannot die again for liberty;
Be they remembered of their land
for aye;

GREEN BRANCHES

Green be their graves and green
their memory.

Fragrance and beauty come in
with the green,
The ragged bushes put on sweet
attire,
The birds forget how chill these
airs have been,
The clouds bloom out again and
move in fire;
Blue is the dawn of day, calm is
the lake,
And merry sounds are fitful in the
morn;
In covert deep the young black-
birds awake,
They shake their wings and sing
upon the morn.

GREEN BIANCHES

At springtime of the year you
came and swung
Green flags above the newly-
greening earth;
Scarce were the leaves unfolded,
they were young,
Nor had outgrown the wrinkles of
their birth:
Comrades they thought you of
their pleasant hour,
They had but glimpsed the sun
when they saw you;
They heard your songs e'er birds
had singing power,
And drank your blood e'er that
they drank the dew.

Then you went down, and then,
and as in pain,
The Spring affrighted fled her
leafy ways,

GREEN BRANCHES

The clouds came to the earth in
gusty rain,
And no sun shone again for many
days:
And day by day they told that one
was dead,
And day by day the season
mourned for you,
Until that count of woe was
finished,
And spring remembered all was
yet to do.

She came with mirth of wind and
eager leaf,
With scampering feet and reaching
out of wings,
She laughed among the boughs
and banished grief,

GREEN BRANCHES

And cared again for all her baby
things:
Leading along the joy that has to
be,
Bidding her timid buds think on
the May,
And told that summer comes with
victory,
And told the hope that is all
creatures stay.

Go Winter now unto your own
abode,
Your time is done, and Spring is
conqueror
Lift up with all your gear and take
your road,
For she is here and brings the sun
with her;

GREEN BRANCHES

Now are we resurrected, now are
we,
Who lay so long beneath an icy
hand,
New-risen into life and liberty,
Because the Spring is come into
our land

(3)

In other lands they may,
With public joy or dole along the
way,
With pomp and pagentry and loud
lament
Of drums and trumpets, and with
merriment
Of grateful hearts, lead into rest
and sted
The nation's dead.

GREEN INFANCIES

If we had drums and trumpets, if
we had
Aught of heroic pitch or accent
glad
To honour you as bids tradition
old,
With banners flung or draped in
mournful fold,
And pacing cortege; these would
we not bring
For your last journeying.

We have no drums or trumpets;
naught have we
But some green branches taken
from a tree,
And flowers that grow at large in
mead and vale;
Nothing of choice have we, or of
avail

GREEN BRANCHES

To do you honour as our honour
deems,
And as your worth beseems.

Sleep drums and trumpets yet a
little time:
All ends and all begins, and there
is chime
At last where discord was, and joy
at last
Where woe wept out her eyes: be
not downcast,
Here is prosperity and goodly
cheer,
For life does follow death, and
death is here.

Joy Be With Us

Joy be with us, and honour close
the tale;
Now do we dip the prow, and
shake the sail,
And take the wind, and bid adieu
to rest.

With glad endeavour we begin the
quest
That destiny commands, though
where we go,
Or guided by what star, no man
doth know.

Unchartered is our course, our
hearts untried,

GREEN BRANCHES

And we may weary e'er we take
the tide,
Or make fair haven from the
moaning sea.

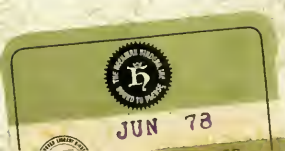
Be ye propitious, winds of destiny,
On us at first blow not too boister-
ous bold;
All Ireland hath is packed into this
hold,
Her hopes fly at the peak. Now it
is dawn,
And we away. Be with us
Mananaun.

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